

Minutes of the **PLANNING COMMITTEE** meeting held at
Groombridge Village Hall on **Monday 13th December** at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Cllrs Andrew Fane, Robert Gordon-James, Alan
Gaukroger, Diana Kelly, Jill Pardey, Chris Pope, Jennie
Paulson Ellis, Marcus Tarling (Chair)

In attendance: Natalie Brett – Assistant Clerk (Minutes)
Debbie Siddle – The Clerk

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Planning Committee.

Apologies had been received from 29 members of the public who would have attended to object to 7.1 but who had felt unable to during the current Pandemic.

There were 30 members of the public in attendance, 27 for item 7.1, 1 for item 7.2 and 2 to observe.

A spokesperson representing the Stop Ardenvale/Little Wold Development steering group which consists of 12 members made the following statement based on a submission to the Parish Council which is available in full in Appendix 1:

1. There should be no major development in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 21 houses would be a major development.
2. This application would be outside of the development boundary which was set in 1987 and has never changed in any Local Plan. This was set up shortly after the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was created.
3. There would be a negative impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The field is elevated above the current residential dwellings and would intrude on the privacy of residents.
4. The new access would be dangerous with limited visibility, no line of sight and an obstruction of an ancient byway which can be seen on a map as far back as 1724. The safety of pedestrians, cyclists, parents with pushchairs and people using disability scooters would be a great concern. Vehicles would have no passing area and large vehicles such as delivery lorries or refuse vehicles would cause a significant and dangerous problem. The traffic survey was taken during lockdown and does not accurately reflect the true situation. The train station mentioned is a heritage line, not a main line station. Groombridge is a service centre where many travel out for school, work, and other reasons.
5. Streetlights would be a breach of the Dark Skies Policy, there are no streetlights in or around Back Lane.
6. The demolition of the house will cause environmental damage and destroy wildlife and protected species.
7. The creation of a separate estate would be a breach of the design guide for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The estate would not be part of the village but would dominate it.

8. There is insufficient plans for removal of sewerage which must be considered. A previous application had been refused by Wealden District Council on sewerage concerns so this must be a consideration in this case also. In addition, the proposed playing field for the school would not be suitable due to being waterlogged. The school is not low on numbers as stated.

It was advised that the statement to object was supported by a large number of residents, including those who have already registered comment with Wealden District Council. By a show of hands at the meeting, the statement to object was supported by the 27 members of the public in attendance for 7.1.

Cllr Tarling thanked the members of the public for their comments and opened the meeting.

1. **ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING** - No

2. **COUNCILLOR CO-OPTION TO PLANNING COMMITTEE**

002172 **RESOLVED** that Cllr Jennie Paulson Ellis be co-opted to the Planning Committee.

3. **APOLOGIES** – None. It was noted that Wealden District Councillor Obbard had wished to attend but due to unforeseen circumstances was unable.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** - None

5. **MINUTES**

5.1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22nd NOVEMBER 2021

002173 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman

5.2 MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM THESE MINUTES.

No matters outstanding

6. **ENFORCEMENT** – The Assistant Clerk to email the committee regarding a report from the Upper Tanyard to be reviewed at the next meeting.

7. **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**
COMMENTS TO BE RETURNED TO WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

7.1 **WD/2021/2568/MAJ** LITTLE WOLD AND LAND TO THE REAR (SOUTH), STATION ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9NE Description: ERECTION OF 21 NO. RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS AND DEMOLITION OF STABLE, DEMOLITION OF EXISTING DWELLING AND ANCILLARY STRUCTURES FOR THE CREATION OF NEW ACCESS ROAD, INTERNAL ROADS, CAR PARKING, LANDSCAPING, DRAINAGE, PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, JUNIOR SPORTS PITCH, ANCILLARY STRUCTURES AND ASSOCIATED WORKS. (Expiry date for comments: 8 December 2021, extended for the Parish Council to 16th December)

Link to documents on web: <http://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=155685>

The committee thanked the spokesperson again for their well thought out and delivered arguments on this application.

The committee agreed that this must be classed as a Major application, the classification given by Wealden District Council of MAJ would support this.

It was suggested in 2.1 by the applicant, that the area carries no landscape or heritage designations and yet it lies within the landscape set out in Wealden, of small fields with hedges which is regarded as the natural landscape of the area. It sits on a prominent sandstone outcrop and lies within the Zone of influence of the Ashdown Forest and the Habitats Regulations which appear to have been ignored where possible in the application.

It was agreed that the site also lies squarely within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and outside of the development boundary of the village, it was further noted that this area was not designated for development within the rejected Local Plan, or the 1998 plan which was reverted too, the housing allocation for Groombridge was Zero. It had also been rejected as a location in the latest Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) conducted by Wealden District Council.

The suggestion that there are no views across the site are untrue, a walk in the area or look at the many photographs supplied shows this is a statement with no truth. It was agreed that a proposal that replaces the natural landscape with houses, roads and all that goes with it, does NOT improve the area. It is later stated in the application that there will be a notable change which argues against what was previously suggested.

It was agreed by the committee and supported by the public along with the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty report that the creeping destruction all around the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has to cease. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty must be protected and it's protected by Law. This development would have a significant and detrimental effect on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The letter by Miss C Boddy was felt to show a clear lack of understanding of this sensitive area. The applicant makes no remarks about the lack of a 5-year land supply, but it must be made clear that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the habitats regulations are protected by the law, the housing numbers are not. The viability of SANGS is questioned as it is a requirement that they be proved, this has not happening on sites across Wealden.

It was noted that the applicant suggests tranquillity can be compromised by horses, yet then suggest they will remain nearby. When looked at with questions raised by the pollution control officer that the noise generated on the proposed site by heating systems, cars, people, service traffic, it was agreed that the development would have a significant effect on the tranquillity of the area.

The committee agree as stated by the applicant's assessment that this is a high to medium important landscape area. They disagree that the removal of Hedges etc within the application are "not significant". These are glimpses of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which the residents, of which there are many, enjoy.

It was noted that the various traffic surveys that have been brought forward do not allow for the fact that the traffic that enters the site, or leaves, can only go one-way, actual movements have been underestimated. The objection made by East Sussex Highways was supported.

The committee was very disappointed that the travel plan was completed in the height of Lockdown and gives a lot of room for argument as to its viability.

The plan supplied on access indicates that large vehicles leaving the site will have to mount the pavement, when turning right; certainly two Lorries could not pass side by side and most vehicles will have issues passing. Vehicles may well have to reverse on site to turn around. It appears fire engines will only be able to get to 145 feet from some of the dwellings and that once vehicles leave the site there is the potential to block the highway continuously.

The historic byway is a well-used main route in and out of the village. It was also noted that there is a weight bridge with a limit of 9 tonnes further down the road which would not support any heavy plant for the site or deliveries.

The suggestion that most of the completed feedback forms support the application does not hold against the figures supplied, the number quoted being approx. 1.5% of the local population does not give a mandate.

The energy assessments stated the site will be more than 40% better in efficiency than other sites yet the evidence is not there to support that. You cannot turn off peoples heating when the air source heat pumps do not get it hot enough, it is also not stated if these will be on all properties. It was noted that no solar energy has been mentioned, nor the orientation of the properties to support this. The committee agree that the energy assessment is vague, and certainly not going to improve the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as suggested.

The application states there are three existing buildings on the site however it was felt this is misleading as the site where the construction is proposed contains stables on it.

The ecology report says there is the potential to impact bats, birds, reptiles and amphibians. The committee questioned the redactions in this report. They further noted that the Nature space report casts doubt on assertions about the Great Crested Newt, suggesting their presence is probably across the site.

Serious doubt has been cast on the plan regarding the surface water drainage, those doubts remain. Furthermore, it was queried given the lower levels of the railway line that nothing has been suggested on how the natural osmosis across the site, will be overcome. The committee could not understand the reference to the Motts Mill site given how far it is away.

The application suggests that it would provide more green space, however the committee noted that there is already ample green space such as the

recreation ground, bowls club, sports ground, tennis club, bird sanctuary, and children's play area to name a few.

It was unclear from the application of the nature of any affordable/social housing.

A significant development is also planned across the border in Kent, however this is within the same village as this application. The implications of two significant applications in one village regardless of the authority to which they apply must be considered by the planning authority in both cases.

The Planning Committee noted WPC was given legal advice that a Neighbourhood Plan was not needed for the Parish as almost the entire Parish was within the AONB and that gave it the required protection against unwanted development.

The committee raised a request that District Cllr Obbard call the application into Committee North if needed.

The strong feeling of those in attendance and those who had already submitted comments to Wealden District Council must be considered by Wealden.

In summary

- The application sits within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and does not enhance this in anyway and great weight should be given to protecting this. It also compromises the integrity of the Ashdown Forest, SSI, SPA, and SAC. This must be given significant weight as it is protected by Law
- This sits outside of the development boundary and is not included in the current or rejected Wealden District Council Local Plans or the current SHELAA. Again, this should be given great weight.
- The infrastructure is inadequate. This includes the water supply, medical support, school places, transport, utilities, and wastewater to name a few.
- Access to the site and proposed houses would be hazardous and a danger to not only traffic but also other users of the historic byway. There is a further concern regarding the 9-tonne bridge.
- The application does not comply with planning policies: GD2, EN6, EN7, EN15, EN18, EN29, DC17, TR3, TR10, TR13, CS2, SP07, SP08, Sp011, SP014, SP015. It also does not comply with Vision and Spatial Planning Objectives SP01 and SP04
- Significant proposed development in the village but within a different planning authority must be taken into account.

- The committee supports and gives weight to the objection from East Sussex Rights of Way.
- The committee supports and gives weight to the objection from East Sussex Highways.
- The committee support and gives weight to the response from The Spa Valley Railway.
- The character and the heart of the village must remain, this application would have a significant detrimental effect on this.

Withyham Parish Council Objects to this Application

7.42pm - 27 members of the public left the meeting

7.43pm Cllr Tarling closed the meeting to allow a member of the public for 7.2 to speak.

The resident advised that they have been working with the Planning Officer at Wealden District Council and architect to address the concerns of neighbours, including the screening, privacy, and visual impact. The reduction in size of the proposal would not allow for turning of cars or visitor parking. The resident advised that there were no intentions to increase the number of cars owned from the current two. Commissioning of an arborist and ecologist were in progress. The resident confirmed that the rest of the field would be left to agriculture, and they would be happy to have any conditions applied to the application as needed.

Cllr Tarling thanked the resident for again attending a meeting regarding their application.

7.50pm Cllr Tarling re-opened the meeting

7.2 WD/2021/2457/FR LAND TO THE SOUTH OF LAKESIDE, MARDENS HILL, CROWBOROUGH, TN6 1XL Description: PART RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE OF LAND TO RESIDENTIAL INVOLVING EXCAVATION/LEVELLING WORKS TO CREATE PARKING AREA, AND INSTALLATION OF LPG TANK AND ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINT. Amended plans received date stamped 30/11/2021. (Expiry date for comments: 15 December 2021)

Link to documents on web: <http://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=155550>

Whilst the committee appreciated the efforts of the applicant this did not override that the application sits within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and possibly within the 400m Exclusion Zone.

The committee would like to see the consideration of the LPG tank being buried.

Whilst planning in this area had been approved in the past this did not override the current planning criteria. Neighbour comments must also be considered and noted.

By majority it was agreed that this application could not be supported.

Withyham Parish Council Objects to this Application.

- 7.3 **WD/2021/2828/F** THE ORCHARD, CORSELEY ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE
Description: DEMOLITION OF EXISTING REAR CONSERVATORY AND
REPLACEMENT WITH SINGLE STOREY REAR EXTENSION. (Expiry date for
comments: 15 December 2021)

Link to documents on web: <http://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=156017>

The committee agreed that the design and access statement was excellent
and the application would sit well with the character of the dwellings.

Withyham Parish Council Supports this Application.

8. **PLANNING APPEALS**

Planning Inspectorate Ref: APP/C1435/D/21/3285849 (WD/2021/1225/F)

Appeal Start date: 24 November 2021

KINGSMEAD, OAK LANE, BLACKHAM, WITHYHAM, TN3 9UB Proposal:
ERECTION OF PART SINGLE STOREY PART TWO STOREY
CONTEMPORARY REAR EXTENSION WITH GLAZED LINK AND
BALCONY AT FIRST FLOOR LEVEL.

The committee had nothing in addition to its initial comment on the application to add.

9. **APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER AGENDA**

- 002174** **RESOLVED** that the observations on the planning issues detailed in these
minutes be submitted to the Planning Authority.

10. **DECISIONS** – All noted. WD/2020/2519/F was noted with disappointment.

APPROVED

WD/2021/2561/F PROPOSED REAR AND SIDE TWO STOREY EXTENSION AND
INTERNAL ALTERATIONS 30 ORCHARD RISE, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9RZ

WD/2021/2387/F DEMOLITION OF EXISTING DETACHED FLAT-ROOFED
GARAGE. PROPOSED PITCHED-ROOF GARAGE LINKED TO SIDE WALL OF
EXISTING HOUSE. ADDITION OF ROOF LIGHTS TO EXISTING REAR
EXTENSION 1 SENLAC PLACE, MEADOW ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9RQ

WD/2020/2519/F CONVERSION OF BARN TO FORM A SINGLE ECO-FRIENDLY
DWELLING, WITH THE ADDITION OF GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP AND
WILDLIFE POND. LEALANDS FARM, STATION ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9NB

WD/2020/1300/F DEMOLITION AND CLEARANCE OF EXISTING GARDEN
CENTRE AND ERECTION OF 5 NO. DWELLINGS, TOGETHER WITH
ASSOCIATED PARKING, ACCESS AND LANDSCAPING. ROYAL MIRES GARDEN
CENTRE, LYE GREEN, CROWBOROUGH, TN6 1UU

REFUSED

WD/2021/1086/FR MATERIAL CHANGE OF USE OF LAND FOR
STATIONING OF 3 NO. TOURING CARAVANS FOR RESIDENTIAL
OCCUPATION WITH ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING
ADDITIONAL HARD STANDING, RETENTION OF FENCING, RETENTION
OF EXISTING TIMBER CABIN BUILDING FOR USE AS SHARED UTILITY

BLOCK AND INSTALLATION OF PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANT (PART-RETROSPECTIVE) HOADLEYS STABLE, HOADLEYS LANE, CROWBOROUGH, TN6 1TH

WD/2021/0864/F CONVERSION OF GARAGE TO HOLIDAY LET 2 OCKLYE COTTAGES, GLENMORE ROAD, CROWBOROUGH, TN6 1TW

WD/2021/2319/F PART RETROSPECTIVE APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE OF PORTION OF NON DOMESTIC AGRICULTURAL LAND TO DOMESTIC AMENITY SPACE FOR ERECTION OF SUMMER HOUSE AND DOMESTIC GARAGE. HOME PLACE, IRONCHURCH LANE, BLACKHAM, TN3 9TS

11. **MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA**
12. **DATE OF MEETING** – A correction to the agenda was noted, that the date of the next meeting is on **Monday 20th December 2021 at 6.00pm** to be held at Groombridge Village Hall unless otherwise notified by the agenda.

Meeting closed at 8.05pm

Appendix 1

Objection to application number WD/2021/2568 – short form for Parish Council

We, Stop Ardenvale/Little Wold, Development Steering Group are objecting to the development proposed in application number WD/2021/2568. We are all residents of Groombridge, and our names and addresses are at the end of this document.

WE OBJECT TO THIS DEVELOPMENT ON THE FOLLOWING GROUNDS:

Point 1A That there should **be no major development in High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB).**



View of the potential development plot from Back Lane, in 2016 when the hedges were lower than at present.

Point 1B That the proposed development **is a major development** within the AONB being a proposal for 21 houses, a major development being defined as **more than 10 dwellings**.

Point 2 That the new major development is **outside the settlement boundary** of Groombridge village set in 1987 since that date never changed in any Wealden Local Plan.

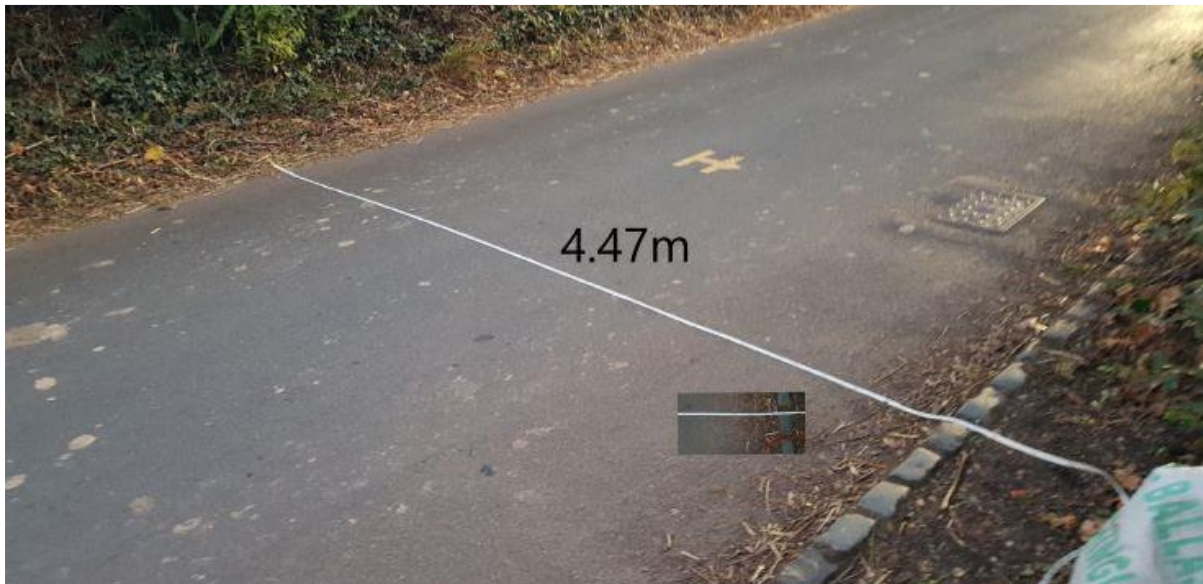
Point 3 The proposed development **will have an impact upon the AONB, the landscape character and visual amenity of the area**. The proposed development will **damage the tranquillity** of the AONB.



The photograph is taken from the private garden adjacent to the proposed development and shows clearly the height of the field in relation to existing dwellings

Point 4 That the proposed new access road is **dangerous, joining a substandard narrow rural road with inadequate visibility**. It will cross and **impede Back Lane**, an ancient byway, making it unacceptably dangerous for all users, i.e. pedestrians, disability scooters, cyclists, and horse riders.

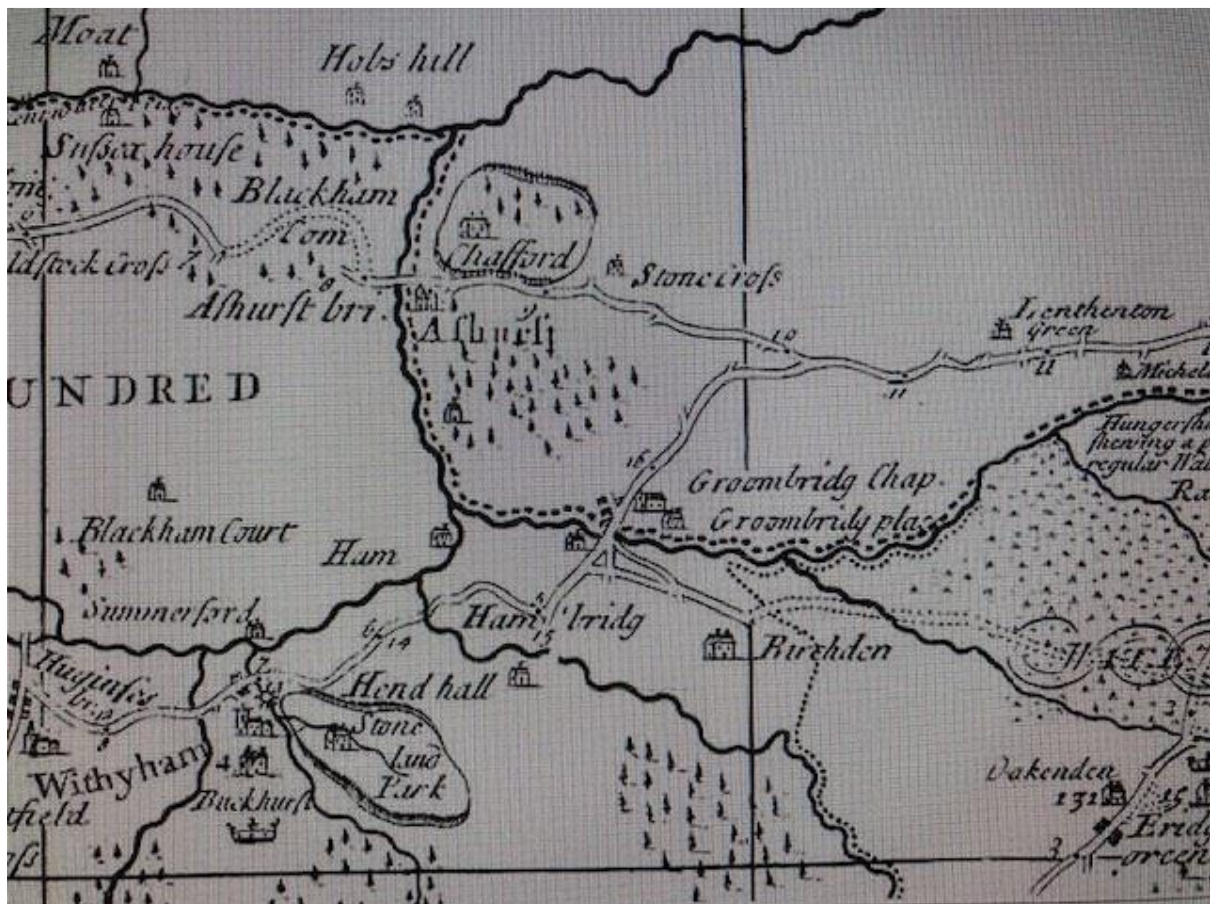




Width of Station Road at the proposed access point



Rubbish collection trucks manoeuvring into Lealands Close which they do every week and block Station Road because of the width. They also reverse up Station Road to turn round in Lealands Close as they cannot go over the bridge



Large scale Map c 1724 showing Back Lane from Birchden down to the main road at Groombridge, prior to any housing built in Groombridge apart from Groombridge Place and Chapel.



Back Lane is the only safe access for those with a disability or pushchairs



Proposed new access road with high hedges and no sight lines. No information on how this transgression of the only safe pedestrian route will continue to ensure the safety of all users.

Point 5 That the proposed development **will breach the dark skies** policy of the High Weald AONB. *The view across the development field looks like this at night on a moonless night. The white dots represent Crowborough lights and the thin grey line is the horizon with a large tree.*



Point 6 That the development will require the **environmentally damaging demolition** of a 4-bedroom family home and stable, both providing roosts for endangered species. The proposed development **will destroy habitat for protected species**.

Point 7 That the development will be a **separate 'estate' that you travel into which is in breach of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Design guide section headed Permeability**. In addition:

Point 8: There are potentially **insufficient sewerage facilities**.